C-TPAT Validation Process
Frequently Asked Questions

What is a C-TPAT validation?

A C-TPAT validation is a process through which the Customs Service meets with company representatives and potentially visits selected domestic and foreign sites to verify that the supply chain security measures contained in the C-TPAT participant's security profile are accurate and are being followed.

What is the goal of a C-TPAT validation?

Since the decision to provide expedited release of cargo, and/or a reduced number of examinations, may be directly linked to a company's C-TPAT documentation, the principal goal of a validation for Customs is to ensure that the company's C-TPAT security profile is reliable, accurate, and effective. However, we expect that validations will also provide a forum through which Customs and a C-TPAT participant can build a stronger partnership by discussing supply chain security issues, sharing "best practices," and cooperatively developing solutions to address potential vulnerabilities. The face-to-face nature of a validation encourages both Customs and the C-TPAT participant to better understand the role each plays in securing our borders against international terrorism.

Is a C-TPAT validation an audit?

No. A validation is not a Customs audit. Whereas Customs routinely performs audits in a variety of operational areas (e.g. trade compliance, NAFTA), C-TPAT validations do not measure a company's adherence to existing government rules and regulations. Instead, the validation is focused on the reliability of the materials that a company voluntarily submits to Customs under the C-TPAT program.

How long will a validation last?

Validations will be focused and concise. Although they may extend beyond two weeks on some occasions due to Customs planning and travel, they will not involve more than ten working days of a company's time.

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Will all companies undergo a validation?

Customs plans on validating the security profiles of all C-TPAT participants. Normally a company's initial validation will occur within three years of becoming a certified member of C-TPAT.

How will validations be scheduled?

The order in which a C-TPAT participant's profile will be selected for validation will be based on risk management principles. Validations may be initiated based on import volume, security related anomalies, strategic threat posed by geographic regions, or other risk related information. Alternatively, a validation may be performed as a matter of routine program oversight. Customs Headquarters will provide C-TPAT participants with thirty days advance written notice prior to the beginning of any validation.

How will validation findings be reported back to the company?

At the conclusion of a validation, company management will be briefed on the findings of the validation. Additionally, a Validation Report will be prepared and presented to the company shortly thereafter.

How will validation findings impact a company's participation in C-TPAT?

Ideally, the report will affirm or increase the level of benefits provided to the participant. However, depending on the findings, some or all of the participant's C-TPAT benefits may be deferred until corrective action is taken to address identified vulnerabilities. With respect to actions resulting from a validation, Customs authority will rest with the Executive Director, Border Security and Facilitation, Office of Field Operations, at Customs Headquarters.

The validation process makes reference to the C-TPAT Security Recommendations. What role do those recommendations play in the validation?

The C-TPAT security recommendations were developed jointly by Customs and the trade community as guidelines that companies should consider as they assess the effectiveness of their own supply chain security programs. With the understanding that they are not requirements and are not all-inclusive, the recommendations may help limit the scope of the validation and customize it to the C-TPAT participant involved.